

DIGNITY, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, and RESILIENCE

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY OF NEEDWOOD



(Above) **African American workers** gather at Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation sometime before 1915. Photograph of party at Hofwyl Plantation, Glynn County, Georgia. Vanishing Georgia.

(Below) **Map** Showing plantations that many Needwood residents came from before establishing the community of Needwood.

COMMUNITY

A sense of place, of belonging; a haven for people with common interests and culture to work, worship, learn, socialize, and thrive.

Monumental change swept across America in 1865 following the end of the Civil War. African Americans, freed from bondage at Broadfield, New Hope, Hofwyl, Grantley, Elizafield, and Evelyn plantations in Glynn County, Georgia, quickly established their own community and congregation. By the 1870s, the congregation numbered 275. Their mighty spirituals rocked the walls of their Broadfield Baptist Church, on the grounds of the Broadfield Plantation.

In 1885, the congregants moved the church one mile to the Needwood Plantation, where they established the vibrant Needwood community.

Needwood's religious, educational, and social institutions were the soul, mind, and heart of the community. African Americans worked within these institutions to achieve dignity, self-sufficiency, and resilience in a time of increasing racist legislation, violence, economic exploitation, and diminishing freedoms.

THE SOUL OF NEEDWOOD

After relocating the Broadfield Baptist Church, the congregation renamed it the Needwood Baptist Church. Members added the towers to the church at this time and used the nearby river for baptisms.



Needwood Baptist Church
(New South Associates)

THE MIND OF NEEDWOOD

Upon establishment of Needwood, residents quickly addressed the need for education. At the time, public funds would only provide teachers' salaries and African American communities had to supply and maintain a building. The Needwood Church congregation provided the land and by 1907, a one room schoolhouse sat nearby for first through seventh graders. The school operated until desegregation in the 1960s. Needwood's church and one-room schoolhouse is a rare surviving example of the

Needwood School
(New South Associates)



educational and religious connection in an African American community that flourished for over 50 years.

THE HEART OF NEEDWOOD

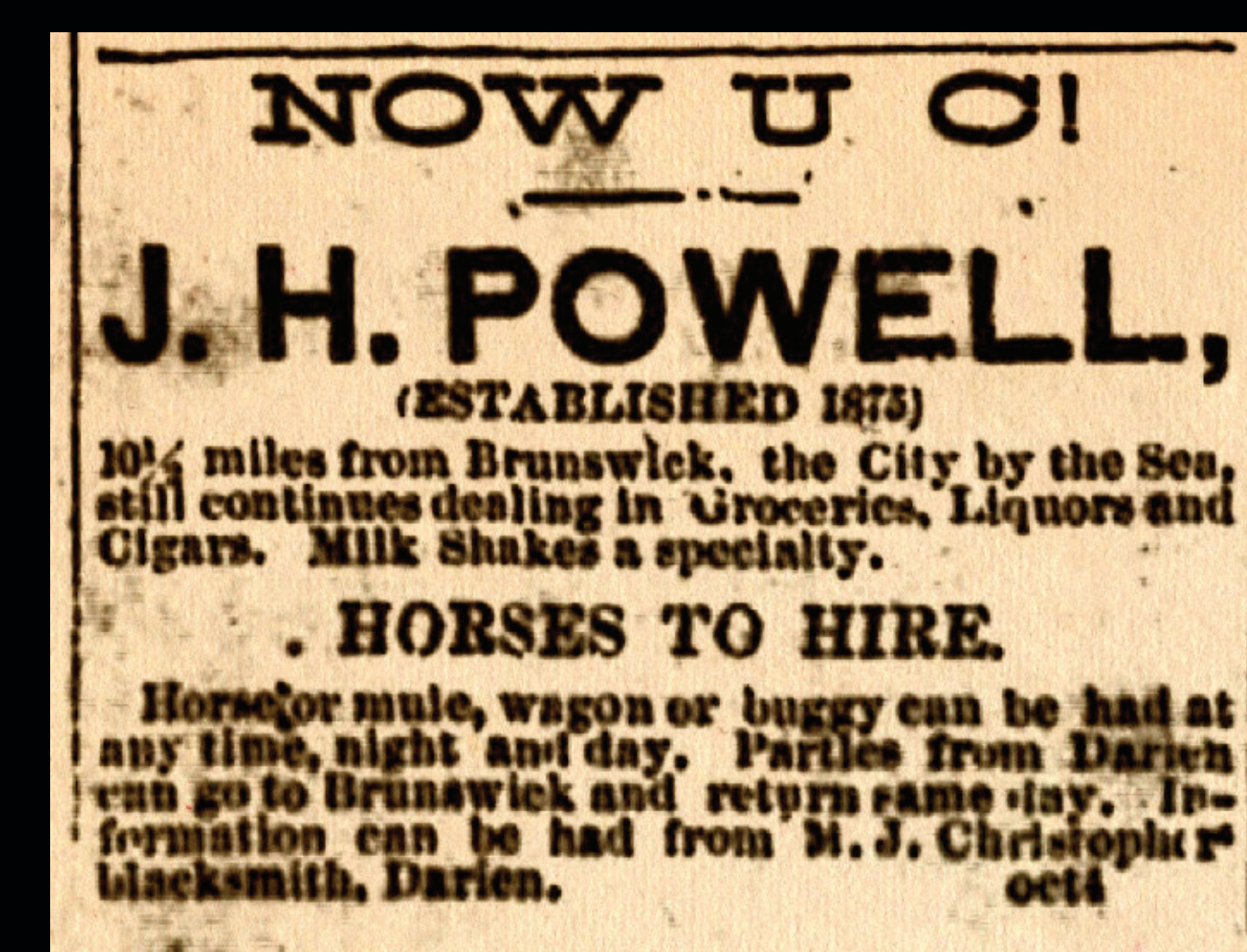
The homes and yards within Needwood were the heart of this self-sufficient community. Residents generally enjoyed 15 acre-sized lots that frequently became family compounds. This happened when multiple heirs became owners of a piece of property, resulting in clusters of homes and outbuildings sharing common yards and gardens. Wooden houses on brick and wood piers, outhouses, and swept yards served as focal points. Homeowners planted ornamentals like Chinaberry trees for shade and beauty. They grew squash, pumpkins, strawberries, figs, blueberries, herbs, greens, and other vegetables. They raised pigs and chickens and other livestock. Residents gathered huckleberries and blackberries, harvested oysters and scallops, fished for mullet and catfish, and hunted wild game. They cut pine trees and some oak for cooking and heating fuel. Very little had to be purchased in Brunswick.

Surplus food was preserved for lean times. Stoneware vessels provided temporary storage while canning ensured long-term preservation.

Like all flourishing communities, Needwood residents supplemented their hard work with recreation and leisure time activities, such as Friday night fish fries.

General stores were also at the heart of the community. They provided access to goods that could not be made locally or collected. Stores also functioned as a place of empowerment, enabling people to connect and socialize, and to share the latest news about the community and beyond.

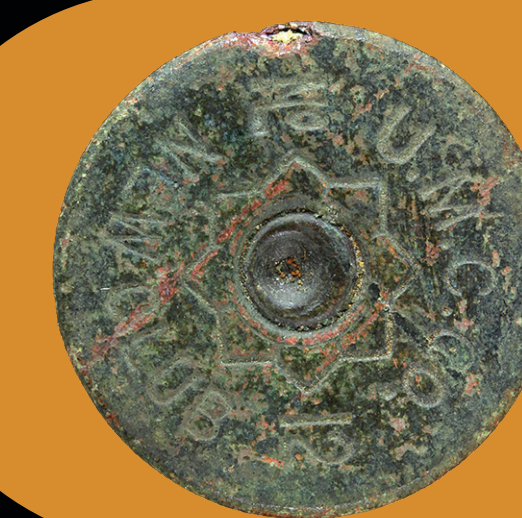
John Powell was an entrepreneur storekeeper in 1875 and by 1888 had moved his business to Needwood. His general store sat about 65 feet from the main road (U.S. Hwy 17). Advertisements and notices dotted the walls across the front of the building. The store's porch provided a place for



Advertisements for John Powell's Store in the Brunswick Advertisement-Appeal.

customers to stop to chat, smoke a pipe, and perhaps play a game of marbles, dice, or checkers.

Powell's store sold vegetables, meat, condiments, milk, milkshakes, spirits, sewing materials, cigars, and shotgun shells. It provided local items, as well as name brand products such as Clorox and Coca-Cola.



HOW DID WE LEARN SO MUCH ABOUT NEEDWOOD?

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is widening US 17/State Road 25 in Glynn County in an effort to reduce crashes. The Federal Highway Administration funds this work; therefore, as part of this construction GDOT followed a Federal law known as the National Historic Preservation Act which passed in 1966. This law requires that GDOT study the area and identify historical and archaeological sites that might be impacted by the construction, and to do something to mitigate, or lessen that impact.

GDOT hired New South Associates to do an archaeological survey, which found one new site in the construction area. As part of the mitigation, archaeologists and historians interviewed residents who live, or have lived in Needwood in the 20th century and conducted oral history interviews to document the unique history of the community. They also researched maps and documents from the 18th and 19th centuries to learn more about the history of the church, school, and site. Archaeologists excavated an area of a site in Needwood to learn about aspects of the community that may have been forgotten over the years. They documented this information in a report.

This panel you are reading summarizes information gathered from the oral histories, historical research, and archaeological work. It is another part of the public outreach that GDOT has undertaken for this project. Documenting the Needwood community is a crucial step in acknowledging the importance of it and other African American communities that prospered within the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, as well as elsewhere in rural America from the late 19th century through today.

